



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Delisting a Species

Section 4 of the Endangered Species Act

Delisting is the removal of a species from the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Downlisting is the reclassification of a species from Endangered to Threatened. Delisting and downlisting actions result from successful recovery efforts. To delist a species, the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) must determine that the species is not threatened based on a number of factors, such as population size, recruitment, stability of habitat quality and quantity, and control or elimination of the threats. If some of the threats have been reduced and the population has met its recovery objectives for downlisting, we may consider changing the species status from Endangered to Threatened. Delisting species is the ultimate goal of implementing the Endangered Species Act (ESA).

Why, when, and how are species removed from the list of endangered and threatened species?

Recovery plans for listed species, developed by the FWS and stakeholders, identify delisting and downlisting goals. When a species reaches its delisting goals, the FWS considers removing it from the Federal Lists of Endangered and Threatened Wildlife and Plants. Likewise, when a species reaches its downlisting goals, the FWS considers changing its status from Endangered to Threatened.

To delist or downlist a species, we follow a process similar to when we consider a species for listing under the ESA. We assess the population and its recovery achievements; we assess the existing threats and we seek advice from a variety of species experts. To assess the existing threats, the Service must determine that the species is no longer threatened or endangered based on five factors:

- Is there a present or threatened destruction, modification, or curtailment of the species' habitat or range?
- Is the species subject to overutilization for commercial, recreational, scientific, or educational purposes?
- Is disease or predation a factor?
- Are there inadequate existing regulatory mechanisms in place outside the ESA (taking into account the efforts by the States and other organizations to protect the species or habitat)?
- Are other natural or manmade factors affecting its continued existence?

If the FWS determines that the threats have been sufficiently reduced, then we may consider delisting or downlisting the species. When delisting or downlisting a species, we first propose the action in the *Federal Register*. At this time, we also seek the opinion of independent species experts, other Federal agencies, State biologists, and the public. After analyzing the comments received on the proposed rulemaking, we decide whether to complete the proposed action or maintain the species status as it is. Our final decision is announced in the *Federal Register*. The comments received and our response to them are addressed in the final rule.

The successfully recovered American peregrine falcon, delisted in 1999. Photo by Craig Koppie/USFWS



What happens after a species is delisted?

If delisted due to recovery, the ESA requires that the FWS, in cooperation with the States, monitor the species for a minimum of 5 years in order to assess each species' ability to sustain itself without the ESA's protective measures. The draft post-delisting monitoring strategy is generally available at the time the proposal for delisting is published in the *Federal Register*. We seek peer review and public comment of this document. Once the final delisting monitoring plan is approved, it is put into action. If, within the designated monitoring period, threats to the species change or unforeseen events change the stability of the population, then the species may be relisted or the monitoring period extended.

Why are species delisted?

Species are taken off the endangered and threatened species list for a variety of reasons, including recovery, extinction, new evidence of additional populations. Over the years, the FWS has delisted few species, because we have focused our attention and resources on saving more imperiled species. For more information about species that have been delisted or downlisted, please visit our Web site at <http://endangered.fws.gov/wildlife.html>.

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Steps in the Delisting and Downlisting Process

